




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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**EDUCATION (STRENGTHENING DISCIPLINE IN STATE SCHOOLS)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (11.42 am): I rise to support the Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools) Amendment Bill 2013. This bill certainly addresses my community's expectations in relation to school discipline. When I make my way around my electorate talking to people, one of the concerns I hear time and time again from parents, teachers and members of my community is how our state schools are not able to effectively administer discipline that addresses behavioural problems. The community is frustrated that the wellbeing of other students is put in jeopardy while principals try to work their way through the complex maze of policy and procedure to deal with problem students. Teachers are frustrated that they often have to work under difficult and disruptive conditions. Some teachers even have genuine concerns for their personal safety. That should not be the case. Perhaps those who are adversely affected most of all by the current situation are the disruptive students themselves. Many of these children come from a background where insecurity, abuse and a lack of positive role models are a part of everyday life. By having processes that lack clarity and do not allow for swift and decisive action, we are only contributing to the uncertainty that these children live with and delaying any positive action that might be taken to help them get on the right track. Effective discipline is an essential part of a high-quality education system that allows teachers to do the work we expect of them and allows students to learn and go on to make worthwhile contributions to society.

This bill is part of the government's education reform Great Teachers = Great Results, and I believe great results it will indeed produce. It will help address many of the concerns of parents, teachers, principals and our school communities. One of the core principles of the government's action plan is empowering school leaders to make decisions about how to run their school. As the minister correctly pointed out when he introduced this bill, nobody is better placed to act than school principals, who know their students and know their community. This bill will amend the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 to provide state school principals with the power, flexibility and autonomy they need to make disciplinary decisions that reflect the values of their school communities. Current provisions mean that principals are very limited in the options available to them and how these measures can be imposed. The time involved in adhering to procedures also means that any real consequence often comes long after the behaviour in question. The removal of these restrictions will restore the authority of principals in state schools and allow them to take quick, decisive action for the wellbeing of their staff and of course the students. Options such as out-of-school-hours detentions, such as a Saturday morning, could become very real consequences. This bill will also increase the short-term suspension period from five to 10 days, meaning that a suspension of up to 10 days will be something that a principal can implement immediately if required. On the subject of suspensions and exclusions, under the amended legislation the grounds for suspension or exclusion of a student will also be bolstered.

Quite often a student's behaviour outside of school can still have an adverse effect on other students and the smooth running of the school, or the behaviour could reflect an unacceptable risk to students or staff. The bill will expand the grounds for suspension or exclusion to include such circumstances. It will also include new grounds for suspension of a student who has been charged with or convicted of a criminal offence if it is determined that it would not be in the best interests of other students and staff for that student to attend the school. Naturally, we do not want to see children being suspended or excluded from state schools in huge numbers. It is still a fact that disruption to education can cause children to fall behind their peers academically and result in an increase in antisocial behaviour, as was pointed out in a number of submissions to the Education and Innovation Committee's inquiry. However, it is imperative that principals have the authority to remove students from their school where it is in the greater interest of the wider school community. It is also anticipated that principals will use their expanded powers to be proactive in implementing behaviour management programs that address the causes of poor behaviour before it is actually played out.

Finally, the bill provides amendments that are true to our ongoing objective of making life easier for those we serve. As I said earlier, the complexity of the existing regulations and the time it takes for actions to be implemented often mean that any intervention takes place long after the behaviour has occurred. As a result, the impact on the behaviour is reduced and the valuable time of principals is taken up working their way through the red tape. The bill streamlines the processes for suspension, exclusion and cancellation of enrolment. It will allow principals to enact immediate responses to student behaviour that reflect the expectations of our community. On a final note specific to the Burnett electorate, we have many schools that are relatively small in size. This means that the disruptive behaviour of a few has the potential to affect a greater proportion of students than it would in a larger school where such behaviour might be more insulated. As such, I look forward to being able to report back to the parents and friends of our great state schools that this government is taking meaningful action to make school life more enjoyable and rewarding for the vast majority of schoolchildren who do the right thing and make productive contributions to their schools and their communities. I commend the minister for bringing this bill before the parliament and look forward to seeing the positive effects it will have in our school communities. I also thank my fellow committee members given the short time we were afforded to inquire into the bill. I commend the bill to the House.